

Revisions to Chapter 5: Building Momentum for Change

Delete last sentence on page 83 and all text on page 84, and insert the following:

. . . It will take all of us to build the momentum for change, and the overarching question posed by the Transportation 2035 Plan can be stated simply: Is the Bay Area ready for the challenge?

ARE WE READY FOR CHANGE?

What a difference two years can make! When we launched the Transportation 2035 planning effort in 2007, the U.S. economy appeared relatively stable, though gasoline prices were beginning a steep climb to over \$4 per gallon a year later. Now, in the spring of 2009, gas prices have plummeted – but so too has the housing market, the financial sector, and the rest of the economy along with them. Many had expected an economic slowdown, but few had expected it to arrive with such sudden and destructive force. Our state and region have not been spared. The unemployment rate in California is in double digits, and the Bay Area is bracing for one of the worst recessions in recent memory. Anxiety is understandably high.

In tough times like these, it is tempting to abandon ambitious goals and just stick to the basics: food, shelter and a steady paycheck. But every crisis brings opportunity. And every missed opportunity makes the next crisis all the more likely. What opportunities for transportation reform does the current economic calamity contain?

- A federal stimulus package – the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 – that not only creates near-term construction jobs but also moves us along the path toward a new energy economy.
- A shift in America’s over-reliance on two dominant modes of travel (auto and air) toward more sustainable alternatives such as passenger rail.
- An acceleration of the local self-help movement in transportation finance as Sacramento budget raids continue.
- A renewed interest in urban living as Baby Boomers become “empty nesters” and as the climate consequences of suburban sprawl hit home.

To a large extent, the Bay Area already has begun to seize these opportunities as reflected in the priorities of the Transportation 2035 Plan. The vast majority of the plan’s revenue is generated right here in the region, and more than 80 percent of the plan’s total budget is invested in repairing the roads, bridges and transit systems in the existing urbanized area. Funds devoted to system expansion are overwhelmingly focused on public transit, with less money dedicated to road widening on a percentage basis than in any other major U.S. metropolitan area.

As noted earlier, however, the Transportation 2035 Plan’s progressive investment program isn’t nearly enough to achieve on its own the Bay Area’s aggressive goals to reduce traffic congestion, vehicle travel per person, and greenhouse gas emissions. Nor, paradoxically, would a radical shift in the plan’s spending blueprint appreciably affect the performance outcome. That is why continued clashes among advocates for project A versus project B are so pointless and counterproductive.

This chapter began with a quotation from Dwight Eisenhower about the importance of planning. Our 34th president also was acutely aware of the predilection of military leaders “to fight the last war.” For some time now, the Bay Area’s transportation policy debate has had a similar feel: advocates keep trying to advance or obstruct expansion projects even though repeated modeling analyses (including the one described in this chapter) have demonstrated the extremely limited impact of capital investment by itself on transportation system performance.

If the region is to close the vast gap between current conditions and our 2035 performance objectives, we need to stop arguing over projects and start forging a united strategy to advance the two policy initiatives that will really make a difference: road pricing and focused growth. It is no accident that congestion pricing and greater densities are the respective “third rails” of transportation and land-use policy. There is something about each strategy to make just about everybody mad.

The Bay Area’s failure to make much headway in implementing these strategies isn’t for lack of trying. But our efforts to date have been disjointed and half-hearted, and often have tended to fizzle when the economy sours. As the Transportation 2035 Plan is adopted, we find ourselves in just such a moment again.

We will have some new tools at our disposal this time around. Senate Bill 375, authored by Senate President Daryl Steinberg, will put the force of state law behind efforts to better link transportation investment and land-use decisions in the successor plan to Transportation 2035. And the stage is set for potentially transformative change in federal policy on tolling when the 111th Congress and a new president take up authorization of the surface transportation program later this year. But the issue isn’t just

whether our state and federal leaders give us the tools to tackle focused growth and road pricing. It is also whether Bay Area leaders will have the courage to pick up those tools and use them.

In the end, *Change in Motion* requires a change of mindset. So we return to that lingering question posed by this performance-based transportation plan: Is the Bay Area ready for change? The answer is up to all of us. The answer is up to you.